

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: European Citizens Prioritize Taste and Food Safety Over Sustainability When Purchasing Food

Country: European Union

Post: Brussels USEU

Report Category: Agriculture in the News

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Report Highlights:

In December 2020, the European Commission released the latest Eurobarometer on EU citizens expectations related to food. This EU-wide survey found that taste, food safety and cost are the main factors influencing Europeans' food purchases. This survey also gives indication about what European consumers consider a sustainable food or diet.

General Information:

On May 20, 2020, the European Commission published the EU Farm to Fork Strategy (F2F) which aim is to develop a “fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system in the EU” by:

- ensuring the food chain has a neutral or positive environmental impact;
- ensuring food security, nutrition and public health; and
- preserving the affordability of food while generating fair returns for the supply chain.

The Commission stated that one of the key approach to achieving the goals of the F2F Strategy is to support EU consumers in making informed decisions when buying food.

To measure public knowledge of the current system, the European Commission commissioned a [Special Eurobarometer](#)¹ survey that aimed to uncover what factors influence EU citizens’ food buying and eating habits, find out what they believe constitutes ‘sustainability’, assess what would help them adopt a healthy, sustainable diet and find out who they think has a role to play in change. It also wanted to discover what their concerns related to food and nutrition are.

The Eurobarometer highlights seven key findings:

1. Europeans prioritize taste, food safety and cost over sustainability concerns when purchasing food.
2. Sustainable food and diets are primarily associated with nutrition and health.
3. The majority of Europeans say they eat a healthy and sustainable diet most of the time, however responses vary greatly by country.
4. Affordability and availability of healthy, sustainable choices and clear information on food labelling are the most likely factors to help Europeans adopt a sustainable diet.
5. Food producers and manufacturers are seen as key actors in making the food system sustainable, above public authorities, but not all Europeans recognize their own role as consumers.
6. Almost all Europeans call on the public and private sectors to improve access to sustainable food and to provide information on food sustainability on food labels.
7. Clear information about food and its importance for health are also reflected in citizens’ concerns about food fraud.

Taste, food safety and cost are main priorities but consumers would welcome more information on food sustainability

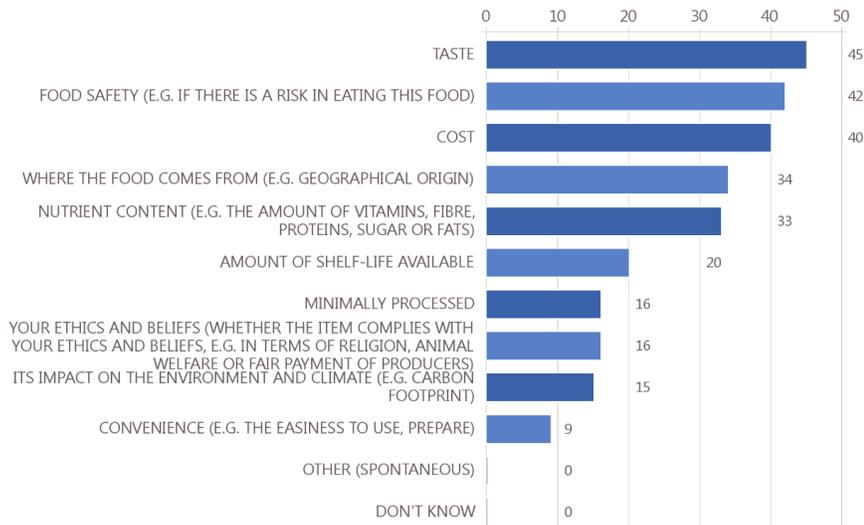
As part of the Farm to Fork Strategy, the European Commission wants to propose a “sustainable food labeling framework that covers the nutritional, climate, environmental and social aspects” of food products by 2024. Currently, it seems like the environmental and social aspects of food are not the priority of European consumers as only 15 percent of them take into account considerations as to a product’s “environmental and climate impact” when buying food. Taste, food safety and cost concerns are the most common answers from EU consumers. However, a large majority of EU citizens would welcome more information on food sustainability. 88 percent agree information on food sustainability

¹ A Special Eurobarometer survey is an opinion survey conducted on behalf of the European Commission. These surveys address a wide variety of topical issues relating to the European Union throughout its Member States. The Eurobarometer results are published by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Communication.

should be compulsory on food labels and 85 percent of respondents say they agree there should be one logo to help you choose healthy, sustainable foods.

One of the other upcoming proposal under the Farm to Fork Strategy is the expansion of mandatory origin labeling. The geographical origin of food is important to more than a third of EU citizens. This was the most frequent answer in three EU Member States: Germany, Slovenia and Sweden and the least frequent in the Netherlands. Interestingly, the younger the respondent the less likely they are to cite where food comes from as an important factor, with only 27 percent of those age 15-24 noting this as most important, against 38 percent of those age 55 and over.

QB1T When you buy food, which of the following are the most important to you? Firstly? And then? (MAX. 3 ANSWERS)
(% - EU)

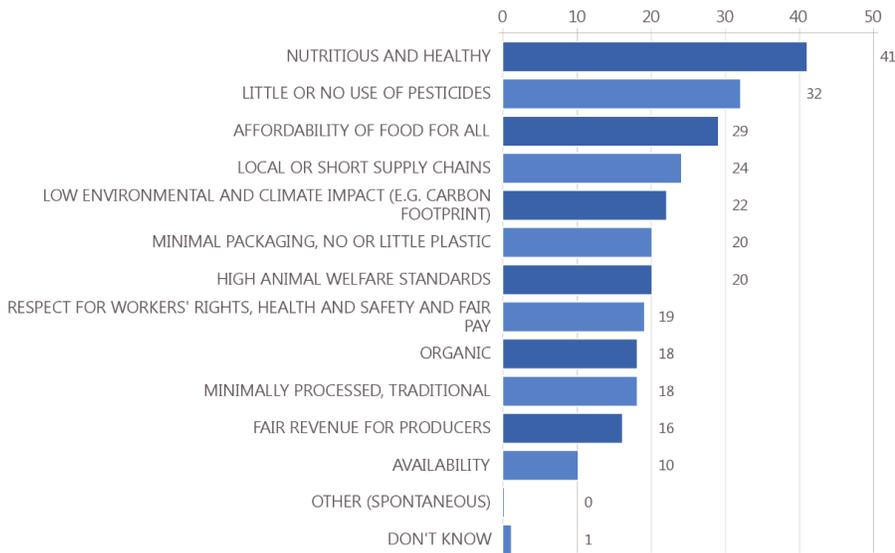


Source: Special Barometer, European Commission

Sustainable food and diets are primarily associated with nutrition but also with ‘little or no use of pesticides.’

When asked what they consider to be the most important characteristics of ‘sustainable’ food, citizens’ most common response was nutritious and healthy with 42 percent mentioning it as one of the main characteristics of sustainable food. 32 percent of respondents also mentioned little or no use of pesticides, which makes it the second most common answer. Additionally, when asked what make a diet ‘sustainable’, a majority of respondents say a sustainable diet involves eating a variety of different foods, eating more fruit and vegetables (both 58 percent) as well as eating food with little or no pesticides (43 percent).

QB2T Which of the following do you consider to be the most important characteristic of "sustainable" food? Firstly? And then? (MAX. 3 ANSWERS)
 (% - EU)



Source: Special Barometer, European Commission

The result of the survey with regards to the use of pesticides may provide another argument for the Commission who has committed to a 50 percent reduction of the use and risk of pesticides by 2030 in the F2F Strategy. However, a majority of consumers also agree with the statement “moving to stricter sustainability standards (e.g., using less pesticides)” could increase food prices (78 percent) and could mean that the EU does not produce enough food to feed people (60 percent), as highlighted by the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS)’s [study on the potential impact of F2F](#).

The results of the Eurobarometer survey will inform the Commission while it is assessing the need for more EU legislation on food labeling, nutrient profiles, sustainability in food procurements and sustainable pesticide use as part of the Farm to Fork Strategy. For more information about upcoming legislative changes, please see GAIN Report: [EU Green Deal – January 2021 Update](#).

Attachments:

No Attachments.